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A Treatise on Finger Control for the Violin

WINCHESTER EDITION

WITH CALISTHENIC AND PRACTICAL DRILLS

COMPILED BY H. N. BATES

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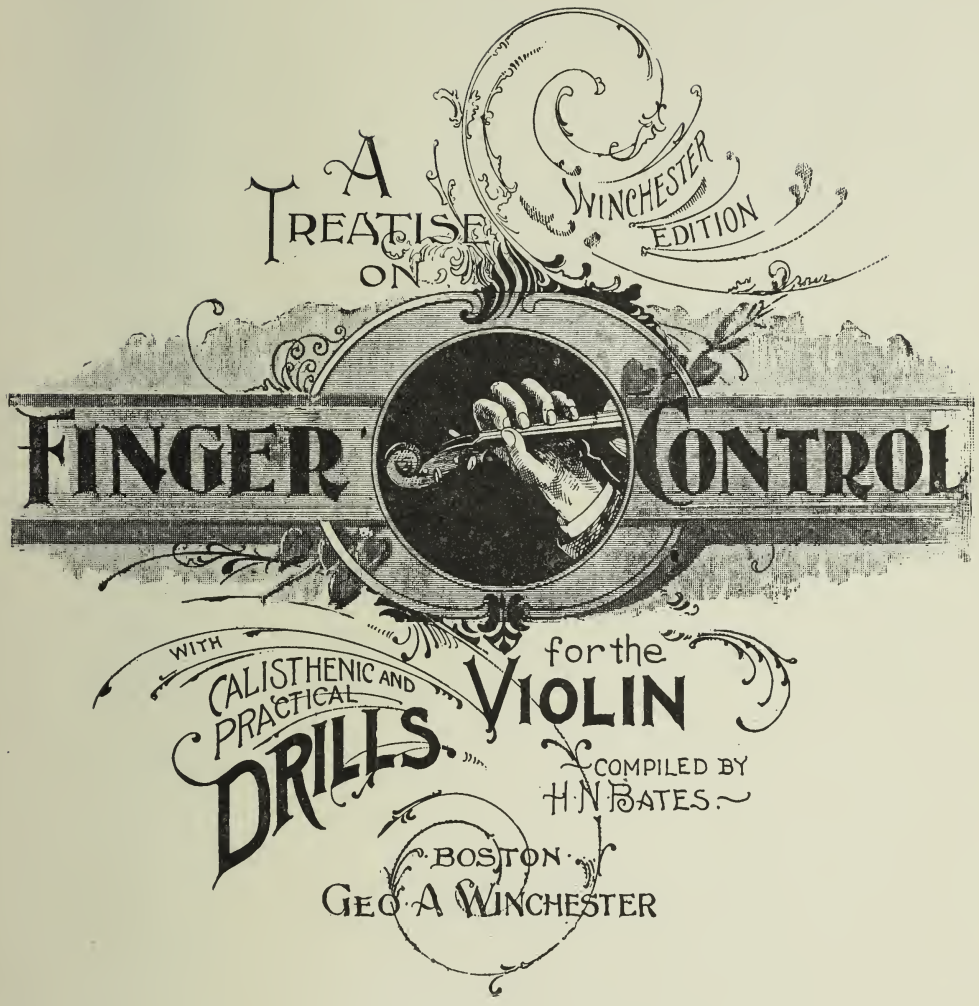
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FINGER CONTROL DRILLS.

COMPILED BY

H. N. BATES.

A THOROUGH, DETAILED EXPLANATION OF ALL THE ELEMENTS OF LEFT HAND TECHNICS FOR THE VIOLIN, WITH CONTROL DRILLS, ACCORDING TO MODERN PRINCIPLES.

PRINCIPLES.

Success depends upon the beginning. Let it be clearly understood that the compiler is attempting nothing more than to furnish the systematic Drills in elementary technic for the left hand so utterly neglected in all violin methods; though it also happens that the same practice is the best yet discovered for developing advanced technics, because final success in FINGER-CONTROL is conditioned by the same Laws that govern a good beginning.

Complexity the difficulty in violin playing. The difficulties of learning to play the violin even fairly well are generally admitted to be greater than is the case with any other instrument, outside its own tribe. The especial reasons for this may be summed up in the word Complexity; the complexity of interwoven and interdependent difficulties caused by the highly complicated and varied employment of head and hands, mind and muscle, in producing the desired musical effects with the severely simple means at command—four plain strings and a bow. In other words, the violin in a beginner's hands might be compared to so much raw metal in the hands of a watchmaker's apprentice, and yet violin teachers and study-writers, who would at once see the folly of expecting an apprentice to complete a watch from the raw material, wholly fail to appreciate what it implies to offer tasks of equally needless complexity to their own untrained pupils. Nevertheless—setting aside Genius, which often appears to be law and method to itself—the average student has far more to hope from Art than from Nature, and he will accordingly find indicated in this restatement of well known facts the true secret of mastery as well as the real cause of failure.

Foundation principles of technic. Thorough elementary Drills; slowly progressing Complexity; everything rightly done; eternal vigilance;— these are the foundation principles of technic so plainly pointed to by the foregoing, but so unsystematically applied throughout the history of violin teaching; for the reason, no doubt, that the practical teaching application of these principles can be little understood by those whose higher endowments include, among the usual defects of such qualities, the inability to put themselves in a learner's place.

One difficulty at a time. Under Modern School Methods, however, the correct principles are at last being scientifically applied. This is done by simply using rigid Drill Exer-

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cises upon one set of elementary difficulties at a time until a suitable foundation is laid before advancing in complexity, in contrast to the ordinary technical studies for beginners, which involve a mass of unsystematically arranged outside matter to please the scholar—while proving his undoing through lack of drill.

Drill is thoughtful, persistent, repetition. The kind of practice meant by the word DRILL is simply the thoughtful, slow, persistent, patient repetition of carefully chosen exercises until CONTROL becomes fixed in brain and fingers. In a word: only the right kind of work will answer and that only when rightly done.

Indispensable to artist or beginner. However dry or unpleasant this work may seem, it cannot be dispensed with, in one form or another, even by the greatest artists, while hundreds of talented players are continually finding out how they have wasted years solely through lack of proper drill at the beginning; or have missed great advantages it is now too late to recover; or have contracted bad habits which possibly may never be corrected.

Theory no substitute for actual practice. The student who thinks will gradually discover that an understanding of the most carefully detailed explanation is no substitute for a practical working out of these details upon his instrument. The rule may be memorized in a few moments, while its full meaning perhaps becomes clear only after months of thoughtful application. Two things, therefore, are needed to make progress satisfactory:—

First: To KNOW;
Second: To DO;

and these two things are first and second in order of introduction only; in importance they are equal, because neither is fully possible without the other. If this book furnishes a clue to the right Knowledge, the compiler has done his part, let the student not fail in the Doing.

POSITIONS.

Not one part to be slighted. Complexity begins with the earliest preparation for practice, yet the student is warned that no part of this complicated preparation can be slighted without placing the player under greater or less disadvantages, while certain parts are of such vital importance that to neglect them means to veto progress at the start.

PREPARATORY POSITIONS.

BODY:

Firmly supported on ball of left foot, right foot some four inches away, pointing outwards and slightly retired. (Cut A. Page 6.)

FIRST WARNING. This position assures repose, is normal, and must be faithfully cultivated, but it is less tiresome to walk about when practicing excercises, besides being often necessary to rest by sitting.

SHOULDERS:

Squared and kept down. Chest up.

SECOND WARNING. An erect military bearing is the only proper position. The left shoulder must not be raised.

VIOLIN:

Held between left side of the chin* and left collar-bone; elevated so the strings lay always level (horizontal); pointed a few degrees to the left of a square front position; tipped so the E string side is somewhat lower than the G side. (Cut B. Page 6.)

THIRD WARNING. The jaw is not the chin, nor the chest the collar-bone. Necks, collar-bones, and shoulders differ, but the principles given above rarely need modification.

A. Failure to keep the strings up level:

*At the left of the tail-piece. A chin-rest is indispensable, and a pad properly fitted over the collar-bone is a great help.

B. Pointing the violin too far to the left:
C. Holding the E-side too low, are three grave faults that rob many good players of important advantages.

LEFT ARM AND ELBOW:

Under the instrument rather farther when fingering the G string than for the E, but always well to the front [cut B page 6] although entirely free from the body.

FOURTH WARNING. It is by no means easy to hold the arm clear from the body and at the same time bring it around far enough front. Avoid any straining.

FIRST FINGER'S BASE:

Touching upper edge of finger-board exactly at the knuckle crease [cuts C & D page 6].

FIFTH WARNING: No other method guarantees the same touch for each finger throughout all the positions, which fact proves this principle to be normal, hence correct.

THUMB:

Resting lightly opposite the first finger's point (or between first and second fingers [cut D page 6]) upon the fleshy ball, more or less of the tip showing above the finger-board.

SIXTH WARNING: Constant care must be given the thumb to keep it absolutely loose in every muscle and joint. If this is attended to, flexible fingering is a sure result and position will adjust itself as independence comes to the fingers; if this is neglected, progress in finger technics becomes most painfully handicapped.

WRIST:

Free, loose, and straight [cuts B & D page 6] on a line from middle joint of first finger to elbow.

SEVENTH WARNING: A stiffened wrist will ruin the finest hand-position. It ought not to be necessary to warn against the vulgar fiddler-tricks of resting the neck of the violin upon the base of the thumb or palm of the hand.

FINGERS:

Well separated; bent to touch the string with perfect exactness across the precise center of their points [cuts C & D page 6] and so feeling the touch of the string, when stopping a note, in that one spot at all times.

EIGHTH WARNING: Everything else leads up to this, and upon it depends the first consideration of violin-playing—Intonation, or playing in tune. The fingers must not crowd together.

THE FINGERS, SEPARATELY.

[On the A string, first position, key A minor, tones A, B, C, D, E, [cut D page 6] this being the easiest string to reach, and these tones the best for all beginning practice].

THE 1st FINGER.

Naturally bent, stopping B with the exact center of its point [cut C page 6].

If the preparatory positions have all been correctly taken, the tip [cut C page 6] of this finger will now be found to be very nearly perpendicular, i. e. at right angles to the finger-board [cut D page 6].

THE 2d FINGER.

Stopping C with the exact center of its point.

Here will be discovered a strong tendency to bend the tip joint [cut C page 6] too much. A careful straightening [cut D page 6] of that joint must be practiced to overcome this defect, which is sometimes so bad as to cut the nail into the fingerboard.

THE 3d FINGER.

Stopping D with the exact center of its point.

The natural tendency of this finger is just opposite to the above, and it requires the opposite training. It tends to touch inside of the point and the tip joint must be sufficiently bent [cut D page 6] to correct.

THE 4th FINGER.

Stopping E with the exact center of its point. [cut D page 6]

Nothing but the most careful study will bring about this result. The little finger naturally falls so far inside the point that many students can hardly be convinced of the possibility and necessity of a strict application of the rule, and yet it can and must be observed, even with the extra difficult Extension.

B.
C
POINT
TIP
TIP JOINT
MIDDLE SECTION
MIDDLE JOINT
KNUCKLE GREASE
BALL
BASE
D
E

PRACTICE LAWS.

Finger Control defined. By FINGER-CONTROL is meant the thoughtfully cultivated ability of the muscles to respond unerringly to the brain's orders. This is the foundation upon which the entire technical training of the left hand must rest. The student who practices for CONTROL is sure of success; the student who fails to keep this end in view can only stumble upon success by accident. The former adopts the Modern School Method, which study *causes* in order to understandingly supply what nature witholds; the latter rashly attempts what Genius alone has power to accomplish under the Old School, with its methodless imitation of *effects* alone.

The advantages of the Modern School Method.

The compiler and his friendly fellow-student are not Geniuses, or the world would have heard of it before now. Let us, then, try to learn exactly what to do and how to do it.

After due attention has been given the Preparatory Positions, the following Practice Laws are to be diligently studied and implicitly obeyed, with thoughtful care and judgement.

Careful study of the Laws a necessity. These Laws are based not only upon practical experience but they will also be found in full accord with the advanced principles of modern experimental psychology, and whole chapters might be written upon almost any one of them. The student who expects to fully comprehend them in two or three casual readings will some day discover his mistake.

LAW I.

THINK! CONTROL is a mental habit and only grows while the mind is fixed upon the work but never comes to wandering wits nor by luck.

LAW II.

FEEL! Everything on the violin is done through the sense of feeling,—the ear is merely a guide and a guard.

LAW III.

PLAY SLOWLY! To practice for CONTROL means to practice slowly, for the mind flatly refuses to be hurried into learning to control exact movements, however willingly it may direct common ones.

LAW IV.

REST! Frequent short rests, with every nerve relaxed, are as necessary as any part of the work; for, whenever the mind is forced too long under drill, CONTROL is liable to stop without warning, while the muscles go on in a mechanical, useless practice.

LAW V.

FINGER MOVEMENTS. These must come from the knuckle-joints [cut C page 6] alone, being made freely, quickly, and decisively, whether the finger is raised or brought down, or whether the tempo is slow or fast.

LAW VI.

TOUCH. The fingers must plainly feel the touch of the string upon the exact center of their points [cut C & D page 6] in one and the same spot, each and every time they are brought down.

LAW VII.

CORRECTIONS. If a finger falls out of tune it should be raised and brought down again rather than pushed into place.

LAW VIII.

RETENTION. A finger once brought down correctly must stay upon its note until again needed. The fingers should also seek their notes as far in advance of the bow as possible.

LAW IX.

FINGER ELEVATION. In drill practice, the points of the first, second, and third fingers are to be lifted as high as the first joint [cut C page 6)

the finger held down, but the little finger should be raised even higher, almost to the second joint (cut c page 6) of the third finger.

LAW X.

RELAXATION. While, at all times, the hand must remain quiet without twisting or shiftiness, the thumb and wrist must be held perfectly loose, regardless of difficulty.

LAW XI.

RELATIVE POSITIONS. The relative distances apart, according to the steps and half-steps of the key in use, should be maintained by the finger-points when off the strings as well as when down, while the fingers must be carefully kept from crowding or even brushing together.

LAW XII.

CONTROL FIRST OF ALL.

CONTROL, being of the nerves and brain, develops slowly, but makes up for this by carrying everything else along with its progress; dexterity, strength, and the like, being largely of the muscles, may be easily and quickly cultivated and yet remain worthless for lack of CONTROL.

CALISTHENICS.

There are valid reasons for including a set of CALISTHENICS in a work of this kind, but it is not considered necessary to give these reasons in detail. Earnest students will profit by the experience of others without demanding proofs in advance, and will practice these free-hand Muscle Drills with care and judgement; the more superficial student will neglect or omit them—along with other equally valuable recommendations — in spite of the strongest admonitions, and will learn later to regret his unwillingness to accept well-grounded advice.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLE. Learn to freely relax every muscle of the hand and wrist, not actually in immediate use. Avoid lameness.

2. After raising the hand to a perpendicular position, about opposite the shoulder and twelve inches away, let it suddenly fall lifeless as a wet rag from the wrist. Repeat fifty times.

3. Do the same with the fingers alone, dropping them from the knuckle joints. Repeat forty times.

4. Carry the hand to the shoulder and let it drop, as above, from the elbow. Repeat twenty times.

5. Hold a handkerchief loosely in the hand. Begin with every nerve slack and gradually close the hand until the utmost possible pressure is exerted, then relax. Repeat ten times with each hand alternately, employing ten seconds each in closing and relaxing.

6. Straighten the arm forward and gradually draw the hand towards the shoulder while proceeding as in No. 5. Five times. Breathe deeply.

7. Commence at the shoulder and push the hand forward while proceeding as in No. 5. Five times. Breathe deeply.

8. Take every bit of life out of the hand beyond wrist, while the rest of the arm is held stiff, then make the hand and fingers wring and shake rapidly, like wet rags, in every direction, moving in circles as far as possible.

9. Always alternate in practicing each drill with the right hand while the left hand rests.

10. Thoughtfully observe No. 1. as a necessary part of every other drill. It is, moreover, impossible to emphasize this principle too strongly for every movement of both hands in the entire technic of violin playing.

A half hour spent on these exercises every other morning will work wonders. Try them, and laugh at the one-sided development which, under the old school, prevents the student's lifting a pail of water for fear of stiffening the fingers.

THE DRILLS.

SET FIRST.

ONE FINGER DRILLS.

[PAGE 12]

These drills require only one finger to be brought down or raised at a time, always bearing in mind that the finger must be raised with the same promptness and precision with which it was brought down.

In carrying out the Principles above laid down, it has been found that one finger movements are the simplest that can be made, and no further advance is safe for beginners until they are fairly well done. For advanced players with the common faults of position, movement, or touch, the one finger drills afford the only practicable means of correction.

The simple management of one finger at a time is not so easy a task as it may seem, and considerable practice without the bow is useful—often necessary—judging the distances for the steps and half-steps by sight and touch. New beginners will at first rarely do more than lift and drop the fingers regularly, but correct playing of this Set First in Time and Tempo is advised at the earliest possible moment.

The Drills on the A, D and E strings must be well worked out before those marked N. B. are attempted—in fact very small hands cannot use the latter to advantage for a long time.

All beginners and many advanced students fail to understand that a slow tempo with prompt finger action is the key to successful practice for CONTROL. *Practice that fails to follow spirit and letter of the "Practice Laws"* [page 7] *is time wasted.*

ERRORS TO BE AVOIDED.

IGNORANCE; which honestly believes that all is progressing right when almost everything is going wrong: HALF-KNOWLEDGE; which does well some few of the many things required while others of greater importance escape notice: LAZINESS; which fails to study deeper than the surface, and throws aside the work as not suited to its wants. Laziness and conceit inflict the world with bad fiddlers unnumbered.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS.

While these Drills cannot take the place of a properly selected instruction book, they do supply what has been lacking even in the best. Advanced students must have the Drills applied to their particular needs. With beginners some book like Dancla's Vol. I may be taken up as soon as a fair start has been made on the One Finger Drills, which must, however, be carried along for months in any pupil's practice. The Retraction Drills must be studied as early as possible, in any case before C major practice is attempted, in Dancla or any other method. G major is the "natural" key for beginners on the violin.

SET SECOND.

INTERVAL DRILLS.

[PAGE 14]

These Drills require two, three, or four fingers to be brought down or raised at one time always bearing in mind that it is not enough to bring down the fingers promptly and precisely—they must also be raised with equal promptness and precision.

This Set, however, consists largely of finger exercises—rather than Drills, properly so called—which it is hoped will be used to replace the unsystematic work of this kind given in instruction books. Intelligent teachers and students will know how to use such of the exercises as seem most fitted to meet individual needs. Whatever practice is devoted to them must be done strictly according to the twelve Practice Laws [page 7]. Neither this nor any similar finger work is of the slightest value when merely "run through," no matter how often. Apply the Practice Laws, or let this Set alone.

SET THIRD.

RETRACTION DRILLS.

[PAGE 18]

The previous Drills set the hand in position and effect the important separation of the second and third fingers, but the reach of the fingers extends beyond this position both back towards the nut (1st finger Retraction [CUT E page 6]) and upwards (4th finger extension). These two vitally important movements are allowed to develop themselves under ordinary "Methods"—with disastrous results, as many a hard working student has discovered to his sorrow. In practicing Retraction none of the following Points can be neglected. The first Drill is, of course, done without the bow, and the second may be, likewise, if desired.

POINT 1. Stretch back the first finger's base-section [cut C page 6] widely from the second without disturbing the position of the hand.*

POINT 2. Bring the point of the finger as close to the base as possible by a very sharp bend, so that it may touch the string as precisely as in any other position.

POINT 3. Keep the hand and other fingers still. Don't twist or displace the hand or the other fingers.

POINT 4. Keep the other fingers, the hand and the wrist all loose. Do not stiffen a single muscle in the other fingers, hand, or wrist.

POINT 5. All retraction movements must be very rapid and sure, with a firm pressure upon the string while gliding back and forth.

SET FOURTH.

EXTENSION DRILLS.

[PAGE 18]

While Retraction cannot be passed over by any pupil, Extension can be practiced by small hands in only the first Drills. Much care must be given the action and touch of the little finger in gliding with prompt rapidity from one tone to another, while the other fingers remain quietly but not rigidly in place. At each rest lift the little finger very high with every muscle relaxed.

SET FIFTH.

CHROMATIC DRILLS.

[PAGE 18]

These Drills require faithful adherence to the Points given under Retraction and Extension, and are placed here in regular order, though a much later period in the study will answer for this practice. Note especially that Point 5 under Retraction applies to each finger in chromatic passages.

SET SIXTH.

TRILLING DRILLS.

[PAGE 19]

Besides their importance as the only true foundation drill for trilling, these Drills when correctly practiced are invaluable for freeing the muscles for independent action, at the same time cultivating strength and rapidity through the peculiar training effected by this alternation of quick, sharp strokes, and short rests. All the necessary precautions for making correct movements — free, strong, high, and square upon the finger point—are especially to be observed in these Drills, which must be practiced in even time and slow tempo, with a very rapid and light down-stroke of the bow in the second series. Let perfect evenness and CONTROL become assured before trying to develop even a small degree of rapidity in tempo, and raise the fingers very high at all the rests.

* In Retraction of the first finger the hand must remain in the first Positi on, and not be allowed to shift back into the so-called Half-Position.

SET SEVENTH.

WEAK SIDE DRILLS.

[PAGE 22]

Among all the shortcomings of old school violin teaching there is none greater than the neglect of any systematic training for developing the third and fourth fingers into equal usefulness with the other two. This Set is arranged to remedy that evil. These Drills are believed to be so important that the student who practices them as all drills should be practiced —with perfect position and movement, and in a very slow tempo until every other difficulty is mastered—will require few, if any, other finger-exercises. Drills that cannot be reached by small hands must be passed over until later.

SET EIGHTH.

DOUBLE NOTE DRILLS.

[PAGE 23]

This work ought to be taken up at the earliest moment permitted by the size of the student's hand and his ability to play the double-stops in tune and to determine correct practice. It has even been claimed that this drill in thirds is a key to the whole technic of the left hand. Firm whole or half-bow strokes for each double-stop are advisable to begin with, followed by slurring two, then four, and later any desired number upon one stroke of the bow. The exercises that require shifting are merely added as hints for further application of this important principle.

SET NINTH.

VELOCITY DRILLS.

[PAGE 22]

Velocity must be looked upon as a consequence of controlled and free finger movement rather than as an end to be gained by direct practice, in fact, no greater waste or misuse of time can be indulged in than to attempt Velocity while CONTROL is still an unsolved problem. In this sense, no special Velocity drills are needed for beginners, but those given here may be used to advantage at the right stage of progress and under the proper principles. The term Velocity refers to a rapid succession of tones and not to the knuckle-joint movements which are not likely to be too prompt or rapid at any tempo.

SET TENTH.

SHIFTING DRILLS.

[PAGE 24]

Shifting is another problem for which violin "Methods" offer no systematic solution. Some of the practical Drills, suggested by the Modern School, for developing correct and easy shifting are given here, and, like all the material in this book, they offer the simplest and surest way to attain the desired results. In shifting always keep down the last finger used until the required position is reached, and then instantaneously apply whichever finger may be needed. Let the first finger govern every position by keeping down on the string with the right touch and feeling in each one. Touch is everything in playing the violin, the ear merely tells us when we have done wrong or right. These Drills may all be practiced with the given fingering, but, of course, with the necessary changes of key, upon each of the other strings.

AFTER ALL

that is done and said, the true development of the left hand technic, after initial movements are established, comes from the practice of scales—straight up and down scales and arpeggios in all major and minor keys, at first as far up the fingerboard as the beginner can go, then, later, from bottom to top, three octaves, day after day, year after year, always at least one half of the time devoted to technical practice.

When practicing slowly, slur two measures with one bow;—four measures may be taken when practicing rapidly. The square notes indicate fingers that must be kept on the string. (Practice Law VIII, Page 7.)

FINGER CONTROL TRILLS.

THE TRILLS.

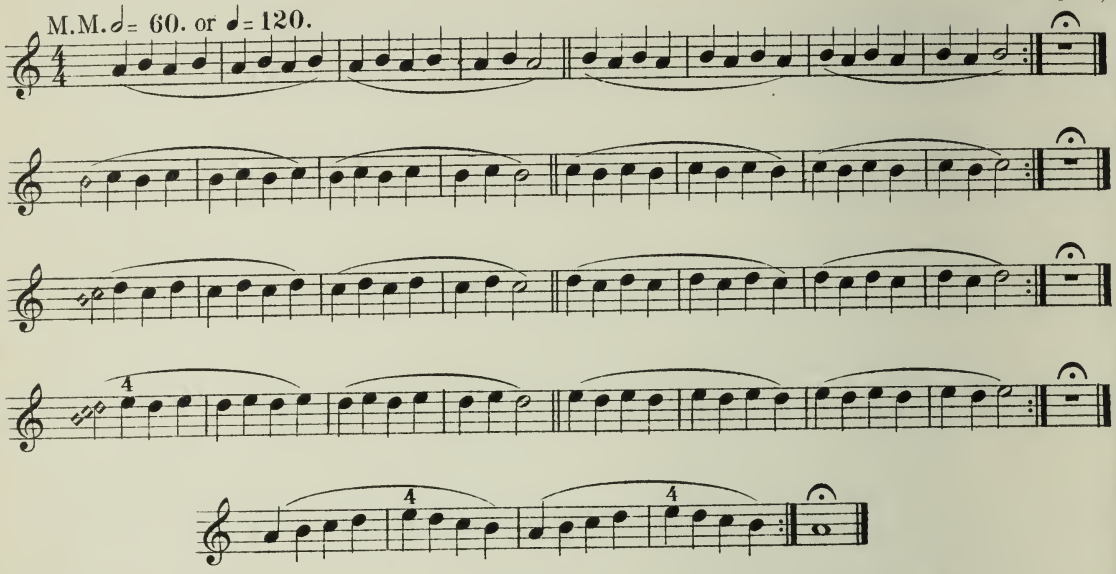
FIRST SET

ONE FINGER TRILLS.

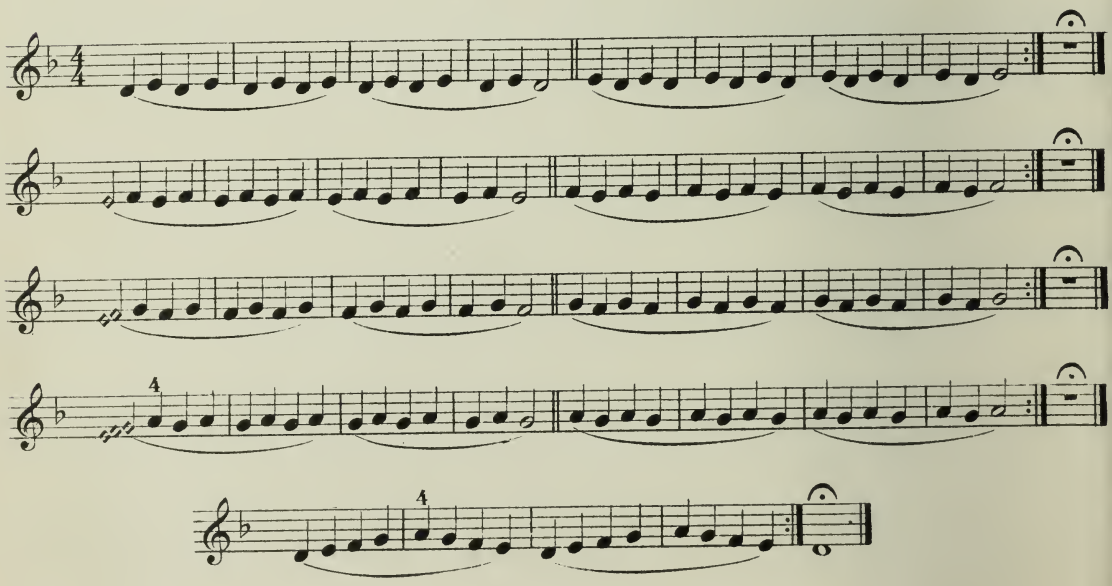
A String. Key of A minor.

(See Page 9.)

M.M. 𝅗𝅥 = 60. or ♩ = 120.



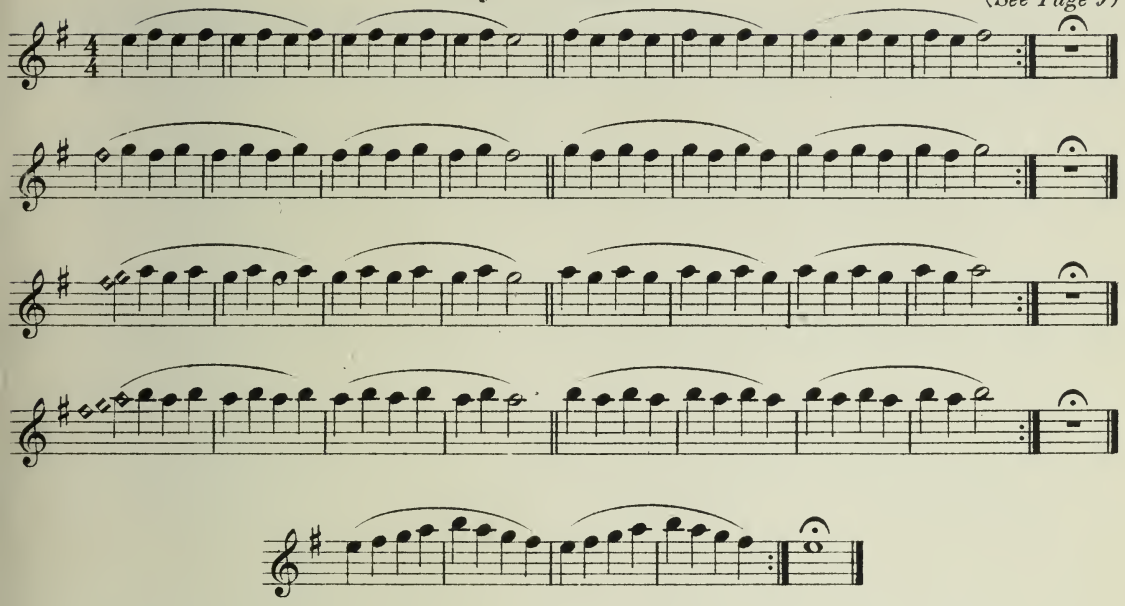
D String.
Key of D minor.



E String.

Key of E Minor.

(*See Page 9*)

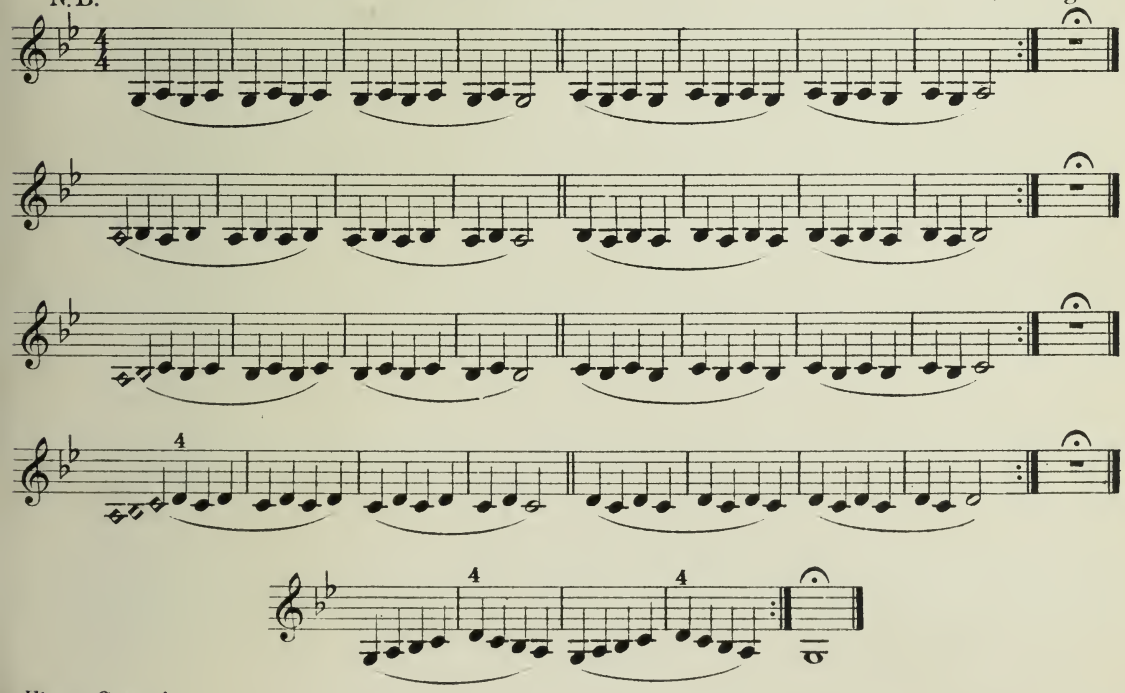


G String.

Key of G Minor.

N.B.

(*See Page 9*)



FINGER CONTROL DRILLS.

SECOND SET.

Interval Drills.

SECONDS.

(See Page 9)

1. M.M. ♩ = 120 *(or slower.)*

N.B.

2.

N.B.

3.

N.B.

Two fingers are brought down or raised together.

FINGER CONTROL DRILLS.

THIRDS.

(See Page 9)

1. A String.

2.

3.

4.

1. D String.

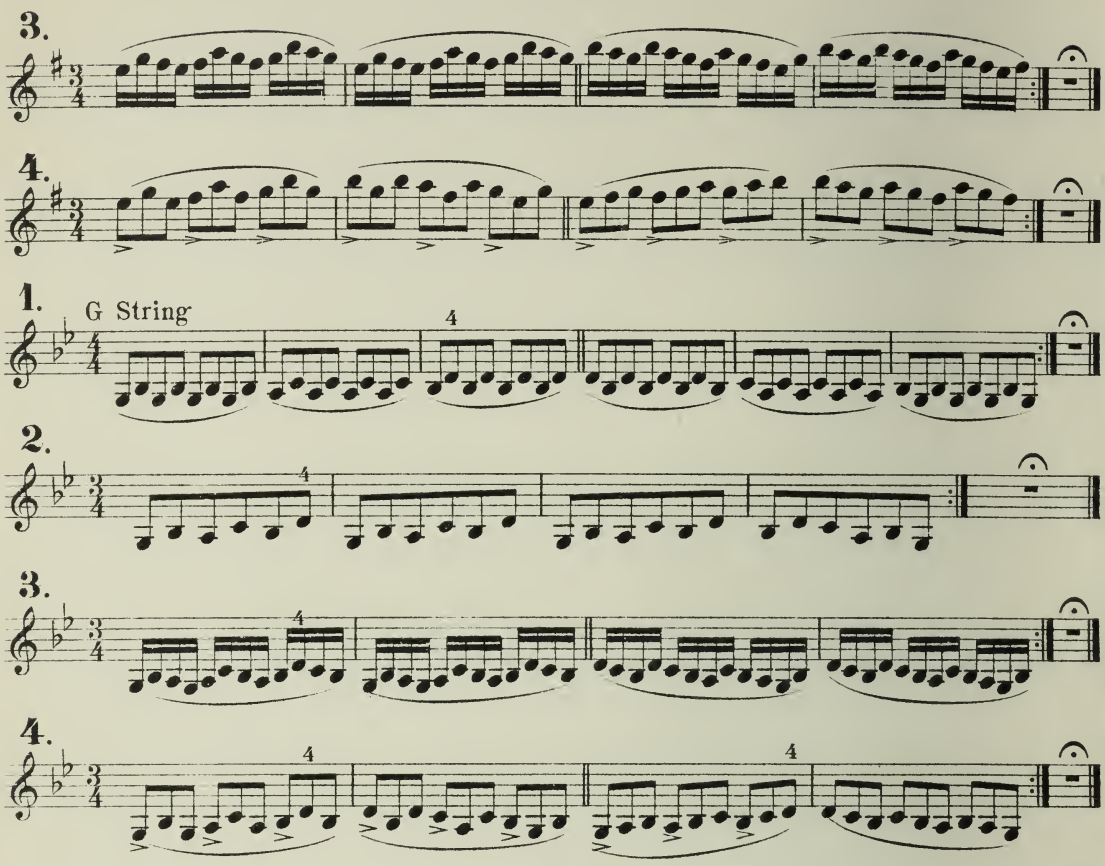
2.

3.

4.

1. E String.

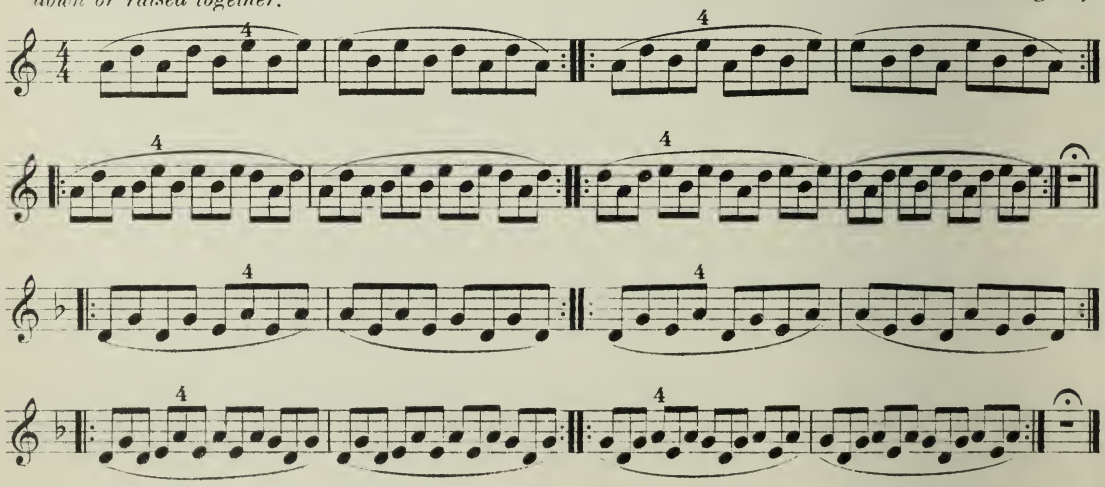
2.

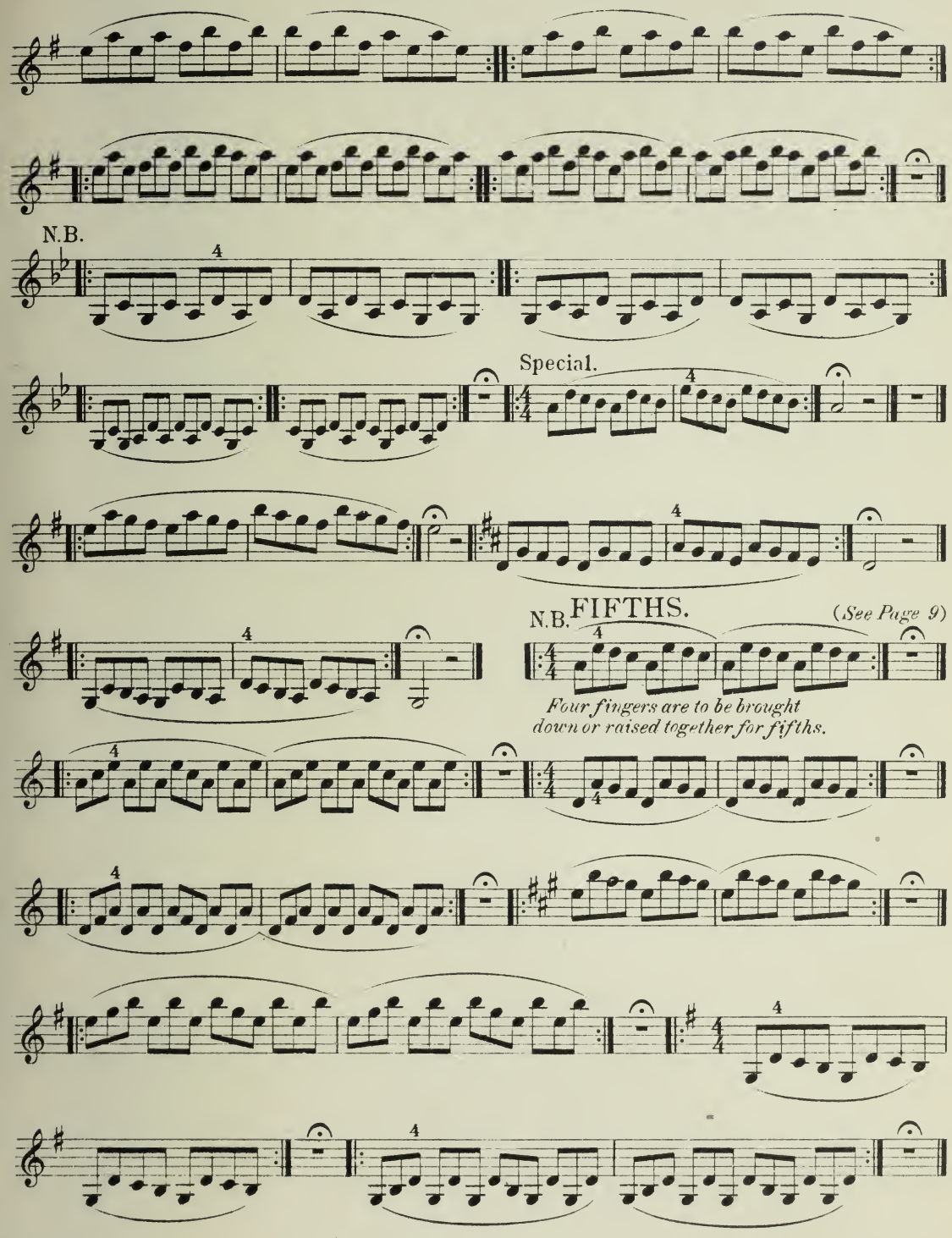


FOURTHS.

Three fingers are to be brought down or raised together.

(See Page 9.)



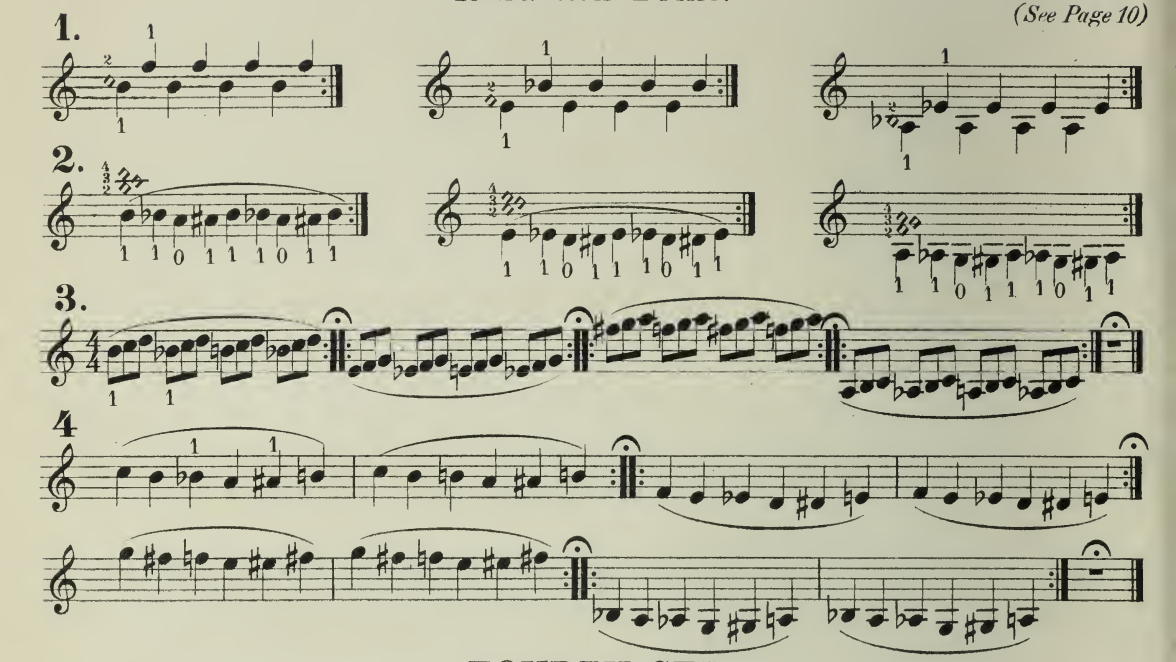

N.B.
Special.
N.B. FIFTHS.
(See Page 9)
Four fingers are to be brought down or raised together for fifths.

FINGER CONTROL DRILLS.

THIRD SET.

Retraction Drills.

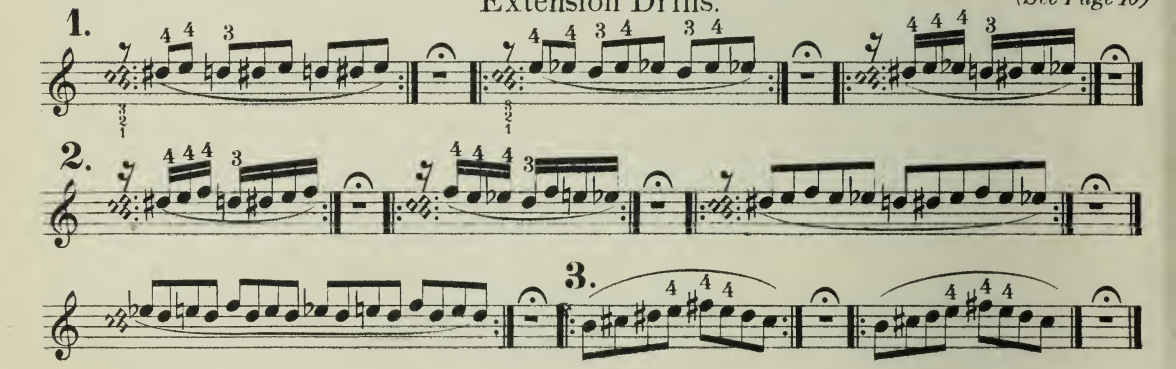
(See Page 10)



FOURTH SET.

Extension Drills.

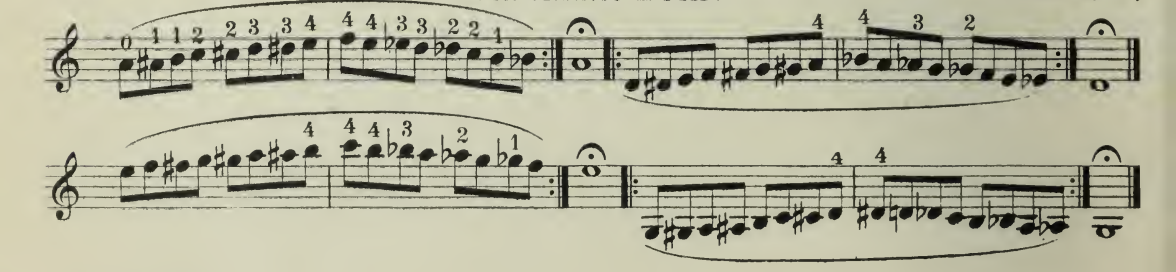
(See Page 10)



FIFTH SET.

Chromatic Drills.

(See Page 10)



SIXTH SET.

Trilling Drills.

1. M.M. ♩ = 60

(See Page 10)

First Finger. One stroke. *Two strokes.*

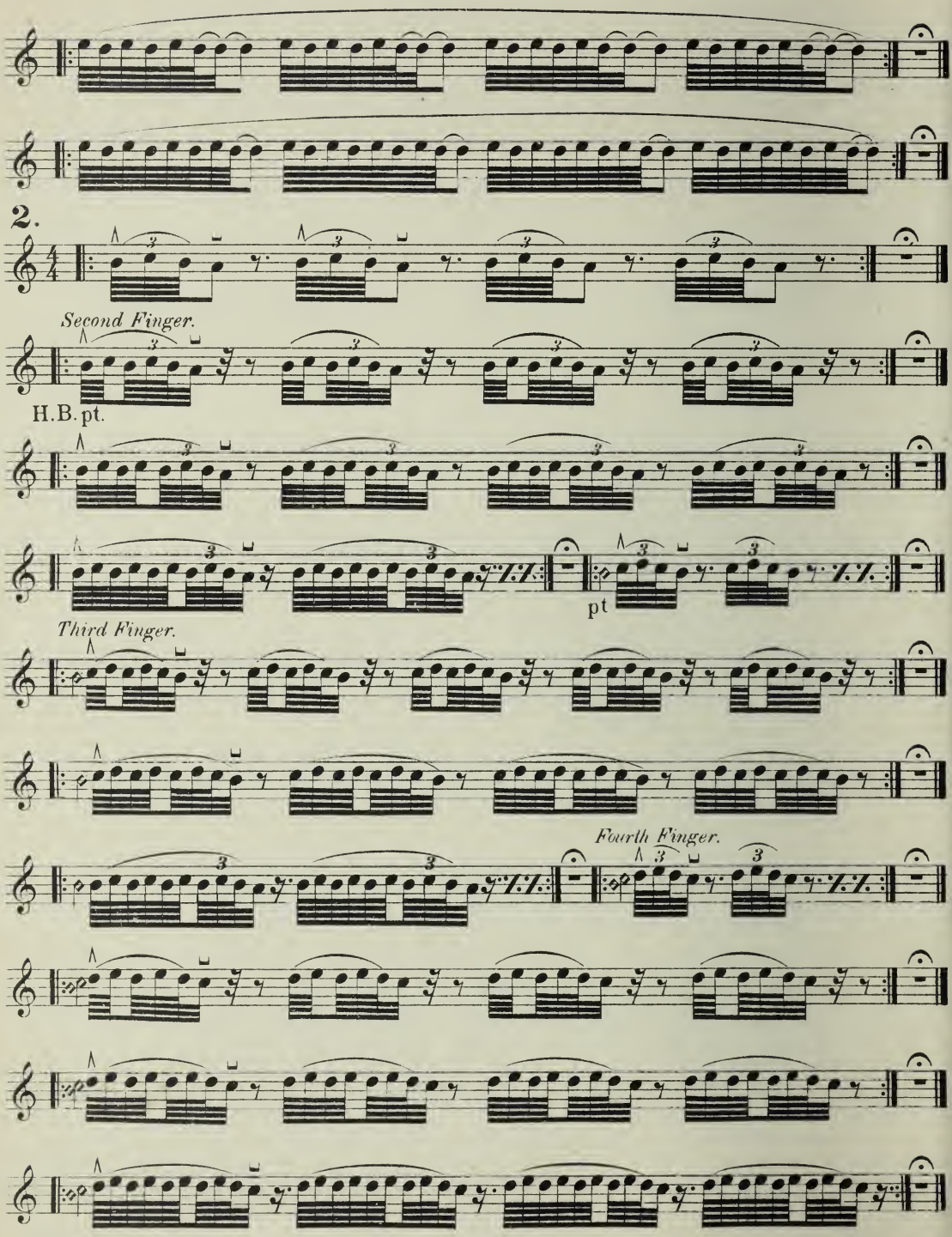
Three strokes.

Four strokes.

Second Finger.

Third Finger.

Fourth Finger.


2.
Second Finger.
H.B. pt.
pt
Third Finger.
Fourth Finger.

SEVENTH SET.

Weak Side Drills.

(See Page 11)

1. M. M. 𝅗𝅥 = 60.

N. B.

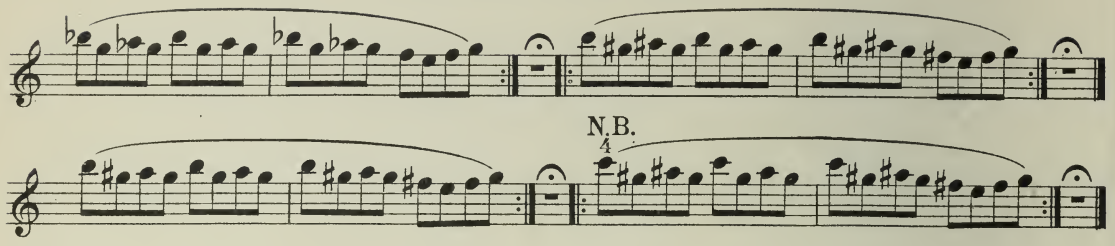
2.

N. B.

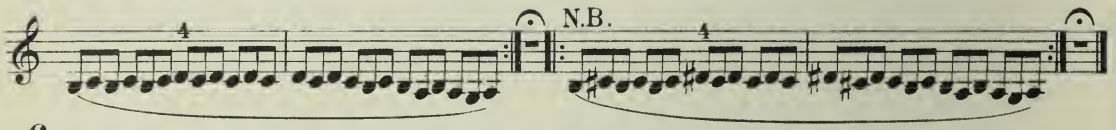
3.

N. B.

4.



5.



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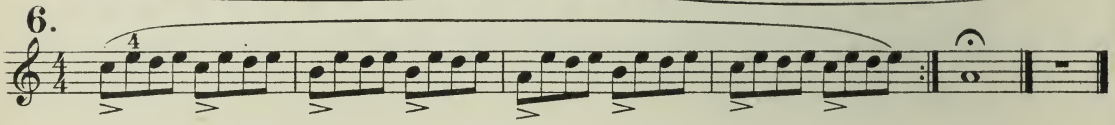
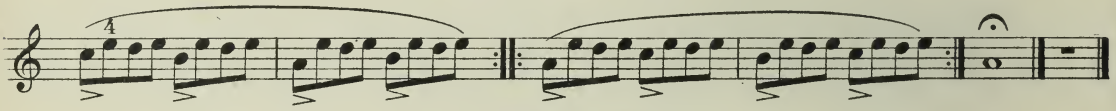


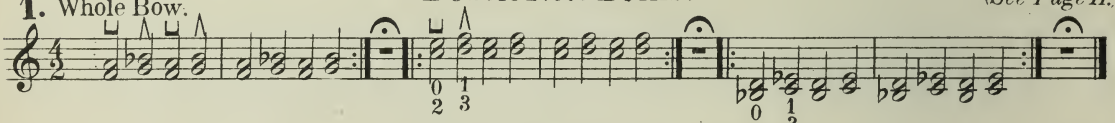


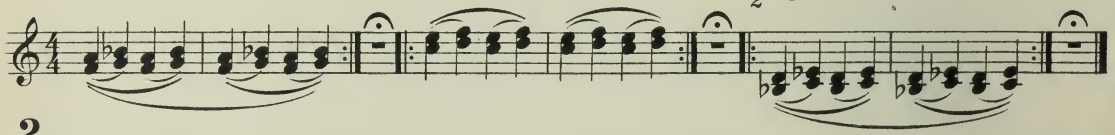
EIGHTH SET.

Double Note Drills.

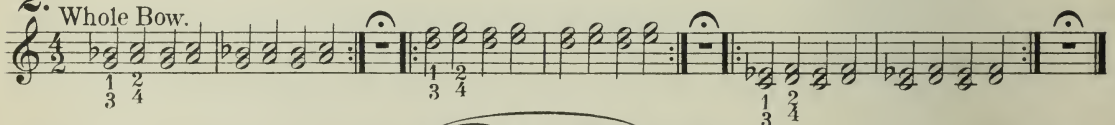
(See Page 11.

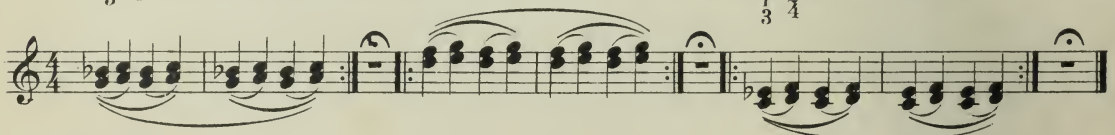
1. Whole Bow.

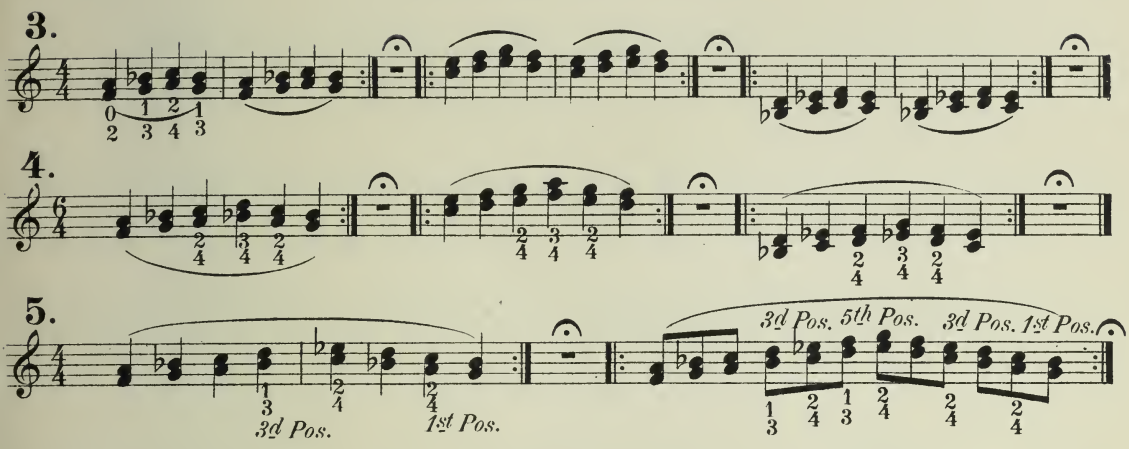




2. Whole Bow.





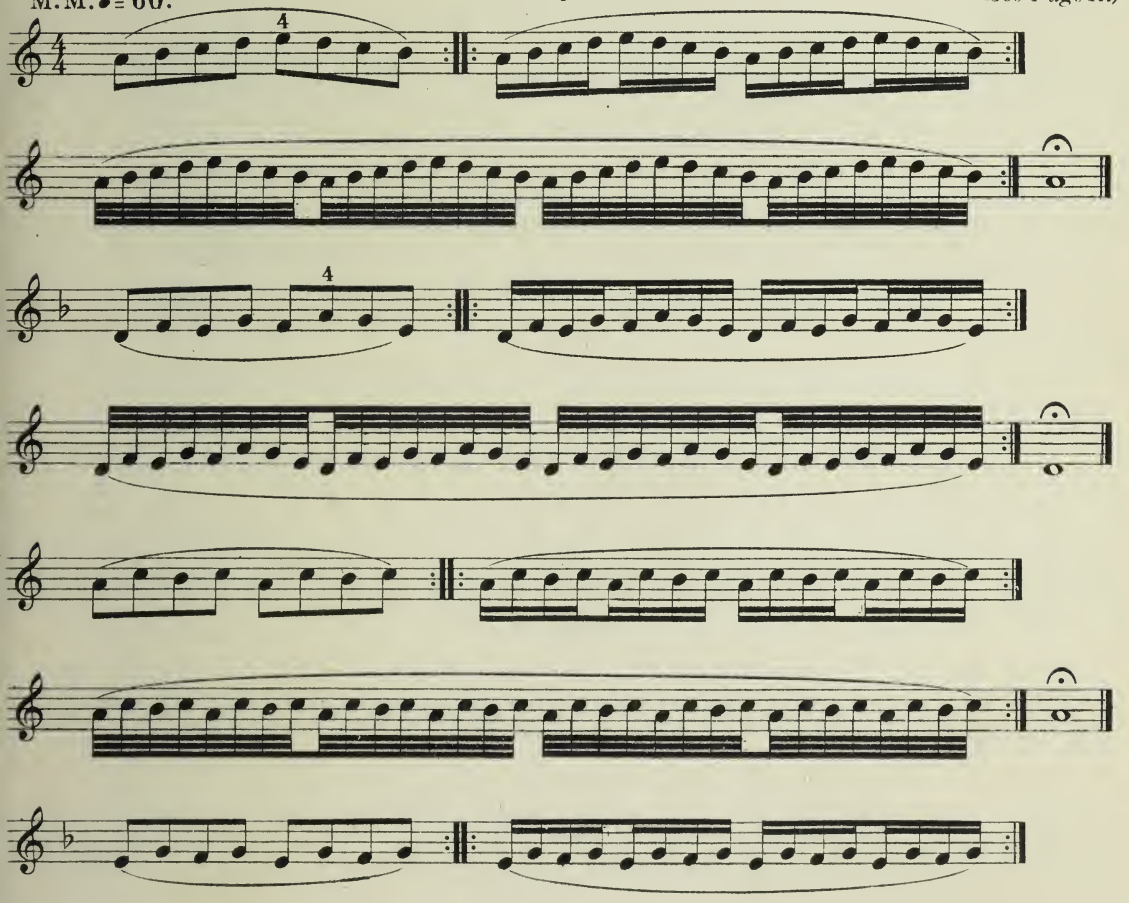


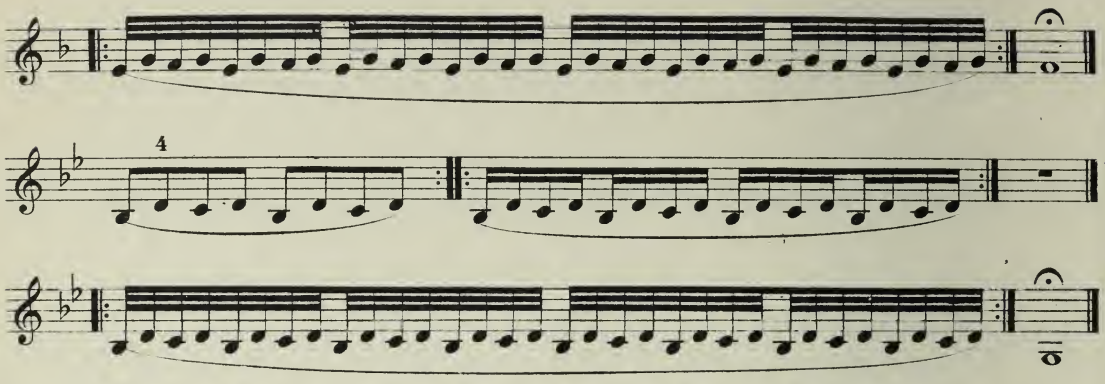
NINTH SET.

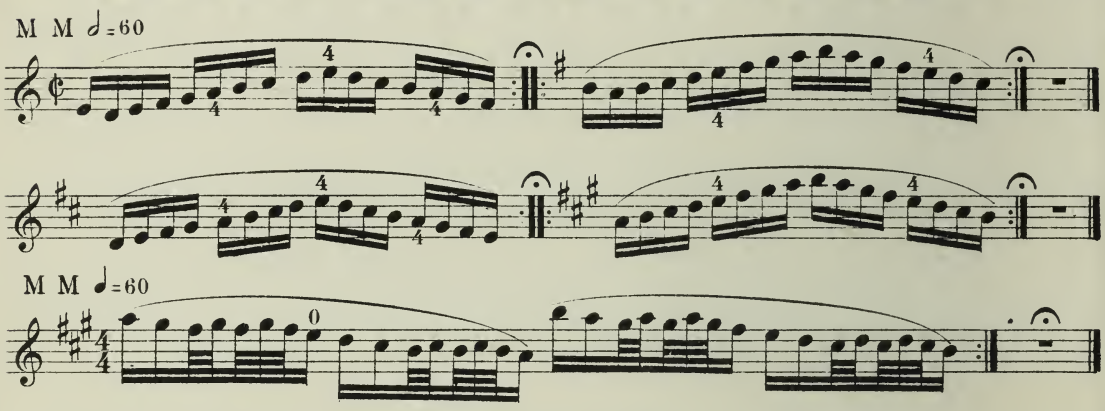
Velocity Drills.

M.M. ♩ = 60.

(See Page 11.)



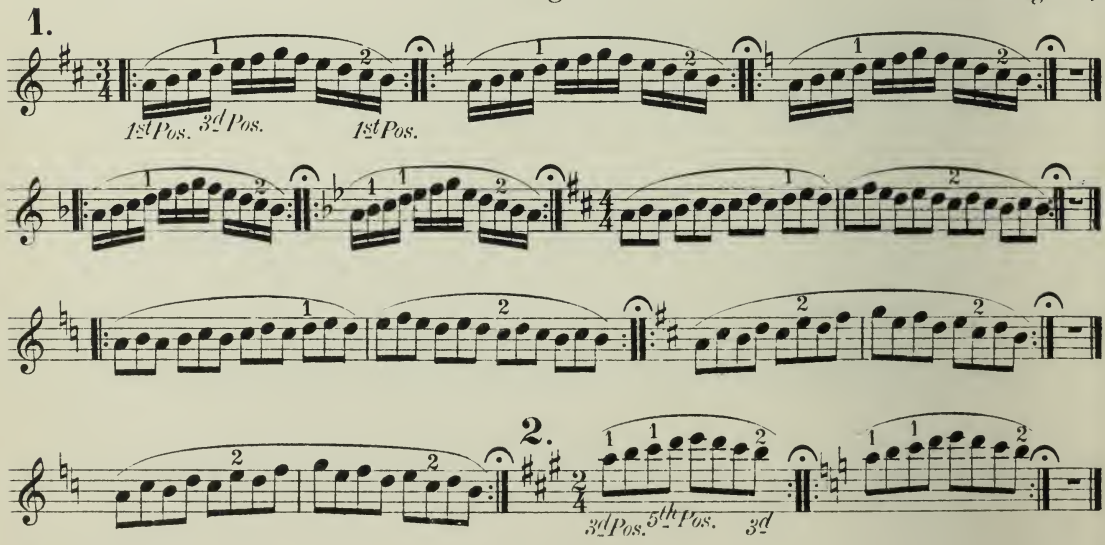


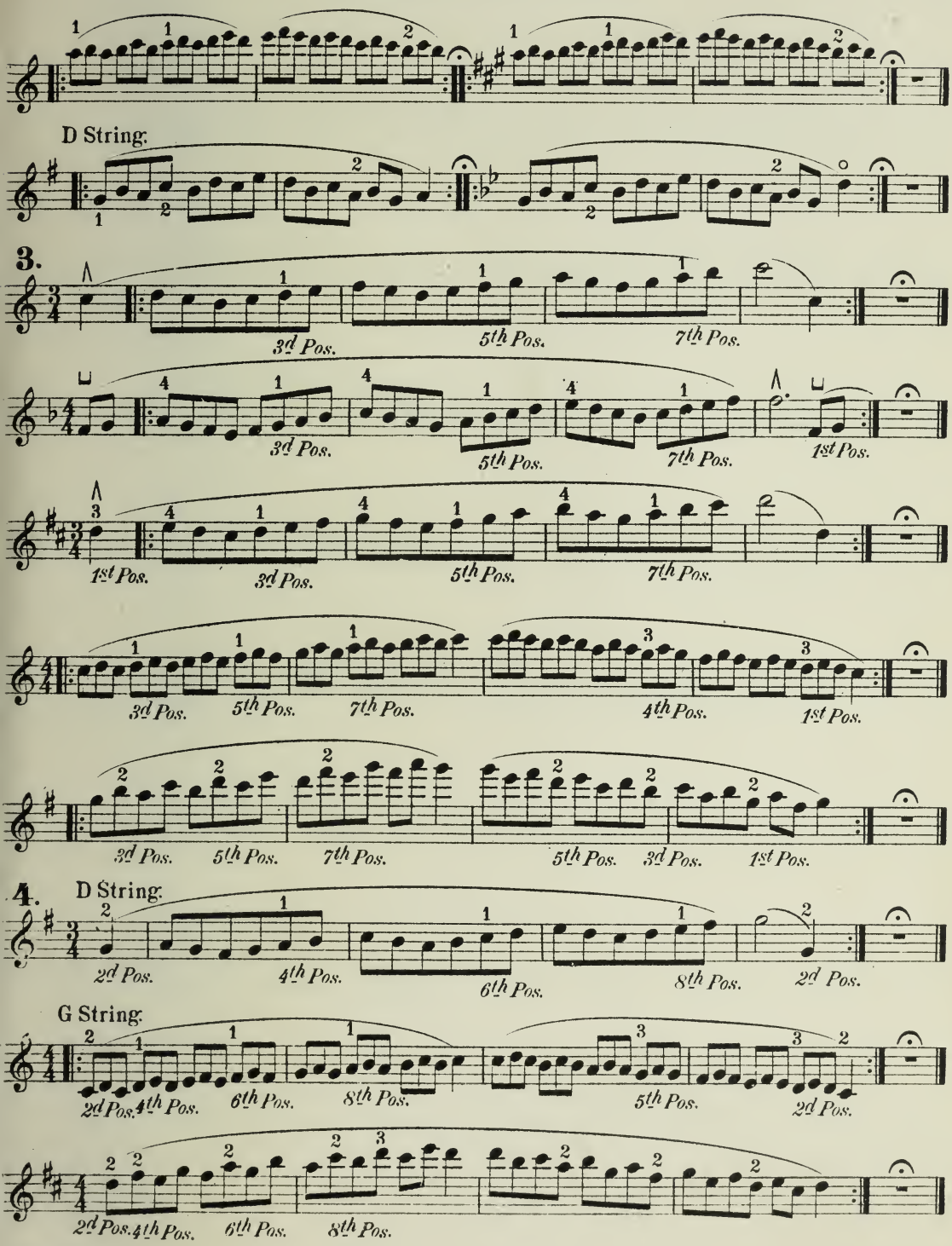


TENTH SET.

Shifting Drills.

(See Page 11.)

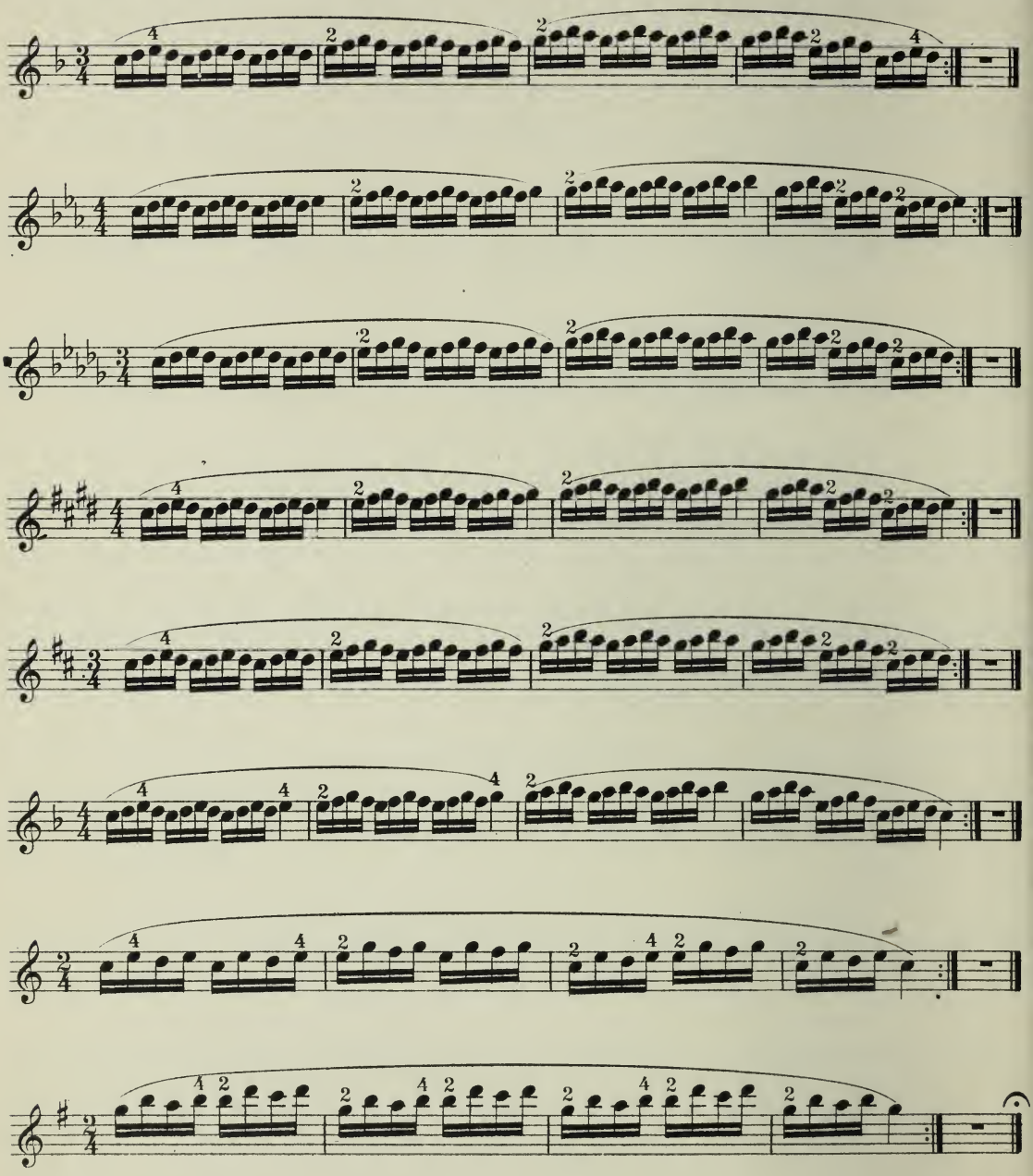



D String:
3.
3d Pos.
5th Pos.
7th Pos.
1st Pos.
4th Pos.
4.
2d Pos.
6th Pos.
8th Pos.
G String:

FINGER CONTROL DRILLS.

SHIFTING DRILLS.

Weak Side.



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